

SEPTEMBER 20, 1978

## POLITICS AT THE FAIR.

ANNCR:

MOST OF THE AMERICAN FARM HARVEST IS ALREADY IN THE STORAGE BINS AND RURAL AMERICA IS LOOKING FORWARD TO THE TRADITIONAL OCTOBER FAIRS. SO ARE MANY AMERICAN POLITICIANS, AS LARRY LESUEUR POINTS OUT IN THIS REPORT.

VOICE:

AMERICANS ARE A COMPETITIVE PEOPLE WHO LIKE TO RELAX WHEN HARD WORK IS DONE. THE ANNUAL HARVEST FAIRS GIVE EVIDENCE OF BOTH THESE QUALITIES. KNOWN AROUND THE CONTRY AS STATE AND COUNTY FAIRS, THESE CHEERFUL GATHERINGS TAKE PLACE OUTDOORS WHEN SUMMER HAS DRAWN TO A CLOSE. FARMERS, SUBURBANITES AND CITY DWELLERS ALL RELAX IN THE ATMOSPHERE OF A LOCAL FAIR, WITH THE FARMERS OFTEN DRESSED IN THEIR SUNDAY BEST AND THE VISITING CITY DWELLERS WEARING THEIR COUNTRY CLOTHES, FARMER'S STRAW HATS AND BLUE JEANS.

THE FAIRS ARE USUALLY FREE AND OPEN TO ANYONE ATTRACTED BY THE CRISP AUTUMN AIR AND THE PUNGENT SMELL OF RIPE APPLES, GOLDEN PUMPKINS AND WELL-CARED-FOR LIVE STOCK. THE EXHIBITIONS LAST FOR ABOUT A WEEK AND ARE THROGGED BY DAY AND NIGHT BY PEOPLE OF ALL AGES AND CONDITIONS. FARM HANDS MINGLE WITH COLLEGE STUDENTS AND FACTORY WORKERS WITH BANK PRESIDENTS, ALL WAITING THEIR TURN TO SEE THE EXHIBITS AND WATCH THE JUDGES AWARD RIBBONS FOR THE SLEEKEST CATTLE, THE TASTIEST HOME-BAKED CAKES AND PIES AND THE BIGGEST PUMPKINS AND WATERMELONS -- NOT TO MENTION THE POPULAR BEAUTY CONTESTS IN WHICH THE MOST ATTRACTIVE LOCAL GIRLS COMPETE FOR THE TITLE OF QUEEN OF THE FAIR.

THIS FAIRGROUND CROSS-SECTION OF THE AMERICAN ELECTORATE IS A NATURAL TARGET FOR THE POLITICIANS WHO REPRESENT THEM IN

CONGRESS AND THE STATE LEGISLATURES, -- OR ASPIRE TO DO SO. COUNTRY FAIRS, WHILE THEY ARE PRIMARILY PLACES TO RELAX AND MEET OLD FRIENDS, PROVIDE AN ATMOSPHERE IN WHICH NO ONE SEEMS TO RESENT THE INTRUSION OF POLITICS. AFTER ALL, THE NATIONAL CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD IN A FEW WEEKS, IN EARLY NOVEMBER, AND THERE IS NO BETTER PLACE FOR VOTERS AND POLITICIANS TO MEET AND SHAKE HANDS. SOMETIMES THE CANDIDATES MAKE SPEECHES AND SOMETIMES THEY EVEN HOLD DEBATES IN FRONT OF THE GRANDSTANDS. IT'S ALL PART OF THE FAIRS' SPIRIT OF FRIENDLY COMPETITION.

POLITICAL DEBATES AT COUNTRY FAIRS HAVE A LONG TRADITION IN AMERICA. SOME OF THE CELEBRATED LINCOLN-DOUGLAS DEBATES MORE THAN A CENTURY AGO YEARS AGO TOOK PLACE AT MID-WEST FAIR GROUNDS. ABRAHAM LINCOLN, THE SIXTEENTH PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES DID NOT WIN HIS RACE FOR THE SENATE, IN 1858, BUT THE DEBATES HELPED GAIN HIM THE NATIONAL STATURE THAT MADE HIM A SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT IN 1860.

MANY THINGS HAVE CHANGED, OF COURSE, SINCE THE EARLY AMERICAN FAIRS FEATURED HORSE RACES AND OX-PULLING CONTESTS. BUT EVEN IN THE AGE OF TELEVISION, THE U.S. VOTING PUBLIC STILL LIKES TO SEE ITS ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES IN PERSON AND THE COUNTRY FAIRS ARE IDEAL SITES FOR THAT EXPOSURE.

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